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Collective Bargaining Assures Stability

By JOHN M. TOBIN

General Vice-President, International Brotherhood of Blacksmiths and Helpers

I HAVE been in the labor movement for a number of years, not always in an official capacity, however. For thirty-two years I worked at the anvil as a blacksmith; for the past twelve years I have been a local representative, and for ten years I have been an international representative. I believe this experience should give me some conception of the attitude of the worker towards some of the plans that have been outlined in the collective bargaining movement.

A PLAN OF COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

One of these plans is one in which there is a house of representatives, a senate, a cabinet, and a court of last resort. This plan of collective bargaining might appeal to those who have never had any experience with officials in industries in which they had to work, but to those who have had, the deception is very plain. In the first place, the house of representatives is composed of the foremen, and the assistant foremen, and if the worker has a grievance he discusses it with the member of the house of representatives, or in other words, with his foreman, or assistant foreman. I would like to ask wherein this differs from the case of the worker where there is no collective bargaining. Is it not true that where there is no collective bargaining the worker who has a complaint is supposed to discuss it with his foreman? Where the complaint is one wherein the foreman is responsible the worker would sooner endure the situation or quit his job than discuss it with the foreman.

Let us suppose it was the intention of the management to see that in all cases where the worker had grievances, these grievances were discussed and given due consideration. Who then is to consider the case after it has been referred to the member of the house of representatives? It is to be taken up with the foremen of all departments. They may have had similar cases of their own at some time or another before the house of representatives, and some consideration was shown them. They have to return the favor, and if not they do not know when there is going to be a complaint against them, for it is the experience of the worker that 99 per cent of the complaints of the worker are complaints against the foreman.

Let us grant there is no such possible condition as I have outlined, and that there is an effort on the part of the foremen or the house of representatives to consider all matters referred to them by the men under them in the order intended. The grievance is approved by them, and the grievance is on account of an order or a ruling coming from one of the superintendents. In what manner would the house of representatives present it to the senate? If it came from the cabinet and the workers took it up with the house of representatives, then in turn with the senate, would we be able to get working men to believe that either the house of representatives or the senate would give it any consideration before being advised by the cabinet? What action would they take on the matter, if any at all.

President Lincoln once said, "You

can fool all of the people some of the time, and some of the people all of the time, but you can't fool all of the people all of the time." This may be applied in the case of workers. It is my belief that in this case the only one that is being fooled is the employer. It may be that his employees are closing their eyes to the present conditions, but the day will come when they will let it be known. They are not to be fooled. Other plans of collective bargaining have been discussed in this volume—some in the shape of welfare plans. All of these are equally impracticable, in so far as assisting the worker is concerned. The worker wants to meet the employer, or the highest one in authority, face to face, and be guaranteed some measure of protection from any discrimination on account of his having complained because of any acts on the part of the foreman, or the superintendent, or the manager himself. That protection can only come from the worker's associates in the industry, when they are permitted to bargain collectively through committees elected in their own way, after they have organized, and are in some way bound to support each other against any encroachment on their rights, or any discrimination against them as long as they do the work they are being paid for and violating no just rules of the industry.

LABOR'S ATTITUDE TOWARD THE EMPLOYER

Labor is distrustful of the employer, and I believe that if everyone had experience as a workman in some of our great industries, labor would not be blamed. Many schemes have been introduced to get laborers to work the harder and produce more, and at the same time reduce their earnings. Employers have introduced the piece-work system, giving men certain prices for

doing certain pieces of work, and when the workman produced more than they supposed he would, then they would reduce the price. The work has been systematized; the worker has been made a one-job man instead of a mechanic. He has been robbed of his ability to earn a living as a mechanic and has been tied down to the one job. He must remain at it whether he likes it or not, for the reason that if he left the job, there was no one who wanted him, other employers having made their own mechanics in the same manner. There is no apprentice system at the present time; employers instruct foremen to put that man on that one job.

CAUSES FOR DECREASED PRODUCTION

The worker has been accused of not producing as much as he did before the war. I shall review briefly what led up to this accusation. In too many industries where the workers were engaged in producing material that was necessary for the maintenance and transportation of our army and navy during the war, many new and unskilled men were induced. All of these workers had to be trained, and the training that they received was of such a nature that many of them became indifferent as to the quality and quantity of the work they did. This was to some extent overlooked; first, because in some instances the employer was working on a cost-plus basis, and paid little attention to production; in other cases, the employee who had been trained in the work was taxed to more than his capacity, working in some instances seven days per week and twelve hours per day. At the time these conditions prevailed, employers were issuing statements that labor was "lying down on the job." That condition has now passed, and if there is any unit of labor that is not doing its

full share it is the fault of the employer.

The organization which I have the honor to represent, notwithstanding the fact that many blacksmiths who had worked as horseshoers and some who never worked outside of a small country blacksmith shop where they shoed horses and repaired wagons were brought into these industries where investigation has been made, has shown that the hours consumed in doing the work were less than 7 per cent, and has long since passed the point where it is back to 100 per cent of what it was before the war. This condition is true in many trades.

ONE SOLUTION OF INDUSTRIAL UNREST PROBLEM

The problem that confronts us is how we are going to solve the problem of

industrial unrest. I have given this matter much consideration and have discussed it with many employers. The only solution that I can suggest is a closer coöperation with the responsible organizations—the organizations that have been fighting the radical element for the past forty years—not by organizations formulated by the employer for the purpose of controlling the labor of one industry or one shop, but organizations embracing every industry organized in separate units or trades where there will be an agreement by which each will be held responsible for any violations. When violations take place, those who are responsible should be punished in the manner set forth in the agreement.